

Hold Fast by Luddleston

Series: [Gravity](#) [3]

Category: Dragon Age (Video Games), Dragon Age - All Media Types, Dragon Age: Origins

Genre: Canon Compliant, Canon-Typical Violence, Canonical Character Death, Established Relationship, F/M, Missing Scene, Oral Sex, Sparring as foreplay, Sub Alistair

Language: English

Characters: Alistair (Dragon Age), Female Amell (Dragon Age), Leliana (Dragon Age), Morrigan (Dragon Age), Shale (Dragon Age), Wynne (Dragon Age), Zevran Arainai

Relationships: Alistair/Amell (Dragon Age), Alistair/Female Warden (Dragon Age)

Status: Completed

Published: 2022-07-19

Updated: 2022-07-19

Packaged: 2022-12-19 10:45:43

Rating: Explicit

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 10,433

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Towers overrun by blood mages, woods infested with werewolves, the site of one of the greatest losses of his life, the realm of dreams itself, and other places Alistair would follow the love of his life.

Hold Fast

Author's Note:

I can't stop myself from writing More Nonsense that Happened to my Warden, so I am continuing to be entirely self-indulgent and am writing exactly that.

Here's the second leg of their journey, going from the Circle Tower>Brecilian Forest>Ostagar

I'm writing this as I play so uhhhhh maybe there will be more once I find my way out of Orzammar or maybe I'll be stuck in the deep roads forever

Alistair always feels a bit awkward being in Redcliffe, *especially* now.

After the debacle of, 'alright, who's going to wake Arl Eamon up and tell him that his wife is dead and his son is a mage—let's just have Teagan do it' and the following debacle of, 'who has claim to the throne, oh wait, it's Alistair, please, Maker, no,' he's *very* happy to follow George into the village to pick up some new gear. At least she seems to understand what a catastrophic idea making Alistair *king of Ferelden* would be, and she's also always ready to help him escape from the castle.

Her leathers and her clothes were torn through by drakes, and right now she's wearing a borrowed shirt of Alistair's, actually, her traveling cloak thrown over it. She's still moving a little awkwardly around the wounds, which is to be expected, it's only been a few days. Although, despite anybody's warnings, she shot a bit of healing magic at them when Morrigan wasn't looking.

She's not wearing bandages anymore, and she proudly showed her scars to the whole camp last night, which meant Alistair (but also everyone else) got to enjoy the sight of her whole naked side bared in the firelight. Sten told her they looked very powerful. Zevran immediately offered to show off his

own favorite scar, which involved hiking up his skirt *way too far* for Alistair's tastes.

She's looking less and less like a Circle mage these days. Maybe it's the fact that she's no longer in such bright colors—she rid herself of the bright orange skirts as quick as she could, and the mustard yellow shirt was the one that was torn up in the Temple. She can get her leather chest piece repaired, so that'll have to do for now, but Alistair thinks it'd be best to get her some real armor. Nothing too heavy, maybe just mail. Something to keep her a little safer.

Normally, she trades everything they've found for coin—weapons, gemstones, whatever baubles she hasn't passed off as gifts to her companions. But she keeps a sword this time. It's a thin, basic blade, no frills, but Alistair remembers telling her it's balanced well.

When they get back to camp, instead of beginning the night strategizing on which of the old Warden treaties they're going to try to redeem first, she asks him to teach her to use it.

"I don't want to be useless when I run out of mana," she explained. "I can carry something like this at my belt even with my staff on my back."

They really *will* have to get her some better armor, if this is the case.

He starts training her in the basics, showing her simple movements. It's fun, he likes teaching, and when she needs help changing her stance or shifting her grip, he puts his hands on her hips to move her, standing pressed to her back with his arms over hers to adjust her position. It's a little more intimate than he'd get training any other junior Warden.

He's doing just that when Sten decides to interrupt.

"This appears to be an ineffective method of teaching."

Of *course* he'd say that. Alistair's about to retort, but George says, "I dunno, it's affecting *me*," and so Alistair just snorts a laugh.

Sten has two facial expressions, *frown* and *deeper frown*. Right now it's the latter. "I thought you were training her to fight, not performing even more courtship rituals." Sten's with Shale in that he's constantly confused or perturbed by their relationship. It's not the idea of physical intimacy that bothers him (Shale says she feels ill whenever she so much as thinks of whatever they're doing in their tent) but romance among comrades in battle is not the done thing under the Qun.

"I'm an excellent multi-tasker, I can flirt and use a sword at the same time," Alistair says.

George leaves them to it, stepping away from him to practice while he argues with Sten.

Sten shakes his head. "This is not the best way to learn. You must face an enemy head-on, blade to blade."

"Blade to blade comes *after* practicing with sticks or something," Alistair says.

"Then how are you to learn how to overcome injury in battle, and what it is like to wound a man in turn?"

George, who's been experimentally moving through the forms Alistair has been teaching her, stops. "*Sten*, I'm not going to *stab him*."

Thank the Maker.

"You should," Sten says.

"I'd really rather you didn't," Alistair tells her.

George only says, "then you'd better watch yourself."

He's pretty sure she's joking.

—

She keeps practicing late into the night, until he's worried she's going to make herself too sore to travel tomorrow.

He's going to voice these worries, but then he sees her cast a rejuvenation spell on herself. He realizes she's upping her stamina with magic, so she's going to last as long as her mana does, which means she could probably go all night. Especially if she has lyrim.

He sort of thought *they* were going to go all night.

He went years of his adult life without a partner, so he should be more resilient than this, but it's been a week (approximately, he's not sure how long they were in the caves behind the Temple) since they've slept together and Alistair is embarrassingly needy.

His mind tells him it's stupid. She's been healing from a near-deadly injury! But his dick, that bastard, has different ideas.

So it's not with entirely selfless ideas in mind that he gets her attention, putting a hand on her shoulder until she drops her arm.

"Am I doing it wrong?" she asks.

"No, you're getting better, it's just... this really isn't the sort of thing you learn in one day, if that's what you're trying." He steers her towards the logs they're using as benches around tonight's campfire.

"I'm not trying to master the sword in one night." She drags the back of her hand across her brow as she takes a seat beside him, finally giving herself a breather. "I'm... distracting myself."

"From what?" He suddenly worries that she's distracting herself from *him*, even though that's stupid, too.

"Because of where we're going next." She'd only mentioned it briefly, when he asked if they ought to discuss. It had been, "*well, we know which one's closest.*"

She lets him take the sword out of her hand and pull off the gloves she's wearing. "The Circle?" He starts to massage some of the tension out of her palms and her knuckles.

"Yeah." She's looking at the fire, not at him, lost in her own thoughts.

"Listen, I know you don't want to go back there," he says. "But I never wanted to go back to Redcliffe, and you got me through that. It stands to reason I ought to return that favor."

She leans forward, her elbows on her knees, her head dropped. "I just keep feeling like they're going to look at me and say, 'well, that was a nice little jaunt with the Wardens, now it's time to put you back where you belong,' and then shut the Great Doors behind me."

"They'd *never*, Georgie." He puts an arm around her shoulders and hugs her a bit closer. "You're a Warden. We need you. You have a sacred duty now, and they can't let you ignore it."

"I didn't say the anxiety was *rational*."

"Also, if they try to take you away, I'll fight them."

She laughs weakly. "There are like fifty templars in there."

"So? I'll fight fifty templars, then. I'll ask Shale to help me, she's fond of you, and she likes crushing men in armor." He hugs her a little closer. "I thought I was going to lose you days ago. I'll not let it happen for real so soon after."

"Thank you." She tucks her head against his shoulders. She's all heat, still warmed up from her training.

"Take me to bed, George?" he asks.

She obliges.

They only sleep together, but they do it chest to chest, with her head tucked beneath his chin, like she can hide in him.

Getting to the Circle isn't so simple.

Alistair knows, academically, what the Circle was: a tower on Lake Calenhad, where mages were kept and sequestered in their own little mage-society, overseen by the Chantry. He knows it's where George came from, and that there was a First Enchanter who had been a mentor to her, a blood mage who had been a friend to her, and a templar who had attempted to be nice to her even when she hated him. He knew it was colorful, full of arched windows that she likes, and that there were no doors to the bedrooms or the bathrooms, a fact which horrified him much more than it horrified George. He knew there were children there, and that she had lived there since she was seven.

Alistair knows what it's like for a child that age to leave home for a strange place full of new people and new rules. He doesn't know what it'd be like if he could also accidentally set somebody on fire with his mind.

He also knows that the 'finding out you're a mage because you accidentally set somebody on fire' thing is a largely untrue stereotype. George found out she was a mage because her little brother used to get nightmares and she would hang a glowing mage-light above his bed to help him sleep. It's why her mage-light is soft orange, not cold blue, he thinks.

She doesn't know if her little brother is a mage. Her older sister is. She was sent to the Circle before George—a different Circle.

Alistair knows they don't keep families together.

All of that is nothing compared to seeing the tower rise out of the dark, glassy surface of Lake Calenhad, so tall the moon doesn't crest it 'til midnight. There is no road to it, and the ferry comes in the morning, so they're going to spend a night in its shadow.

George faces it with her mouth set in a grim line.

Alistair decides they've enough coin for their small party to spend the night in the inn, even if the rest who stayed back at camp are going to be magnificently jealous. Camping on the water is out, not with that tower looming over them. He asks for two rooms, one that doesn't face the lake, and there's no question he and George are going to share. Leliana is pleased to have her own room, and even more pleased that she gets to borrow Pudding for the night.

George brightens when they get indoors, even if she must know he's done this to shield her from her past, the same way she told Tegan they wouldn't be spending the night in the castle.

She also has another reason for her happiness, which she's not shy about. "You know, Alistair, I've been just *waiting* to fuck you in a bed."

He drops his pack right on the floor with a clatter when she says that.

That part of their night comes *after* a bath, which is wonderful in its own way. The tub is less wonderful; it's far too small for either of them. George heats up the water, though, so he appreciates that immensely.

He also appreciates the way George undresses without shame in front of him, letting him watch the way she moves when she's not beneath layers of clothes. Their constant routine of combat has her putting on a lot of muscle, particularly in her thighs and calves (she already had incredible arms thanks to all the staff work). The scars on her ribs have healed nicely thanks to time and magic, a series of pink talon-marks etched into her skin.

She really is shaped a lot like a warrior now, isn't she?

She's shaped a lot like a *woman*, too, a fact which he is very focused on from where he's lying on the bed, a fresh towel around his hips, still damp from his bath and eyeing her without reservation. She doesn't look like how his mind used to picture women, like one of those paintings of Andraste that used to make him giggle because there was a *naked lady* on the wall of the monastery. In those, all the women are soft and pale, without a mark on them, delicate hands and curves, pink lips and soft doe eyes. George has

freckles and an uneven tan, dark hair on her arms and legs, and she's so much more *real* than any painting.

She's got curves that would catch any artist's eye, though. Alistair is a terrible artist, but he thinks he understands aesthetics to this degree, at least.

She decided to bathe second because she said it takes her so long to wash her hair. She sits down in the water to do it, pulling her knees up to her chest and tipping her head forward, working soap into the roots. She's got prettier hair than any painting he's ever seen, too.

"I hope you know how deeply flattering it is to be watched the way you're looking at me," she says.

"Good." He's lying on his stomach, his head resting on his folded arms. "You're gorgeous."

"I like to hear that appreciated." She uses her comb to remove all the grime from a few days' travel from the ends of her hair. For a while, she'd kept it loose because the angle she had to hold her hands at to tie it in a bun was too painful for her with the wound on her side. Alistair was happy to braid it for her every night, but he didn't think he could properly do whatever it was she did to pull it back without tugging too hard and hurting her. "Maker, I wish this bath was bigger."

"Duncan told me once that in Rivain, they have public bath houses, with huge pools, the size of a grand hall. It sounded so *nice*, until I realized that I'd be in there with dozens of other people."

"But at least Duncan would also be there."

"Yeaaaah, I think that would make that worse," Alistair says. "Just. No. Don't want to see my mentor in the nude."

"Speak for yourself." She's grinning, and he's got his jaw dropped.

"*Duncan?*"

She shrugs. "When he showed up at the Circle, he was the most handsome man I'd ever seen. I followed him around like a lost mabari pup all day, asking him question after question about the Wardens, until Irving told me to stop bothering him. I think you're better-looking, though."

"That can't be true." Alistair even thinks Duncan is handsomer than he is. Was. Well. It's easier to think about Duncan in the present tense when they're just chatting.

"Maybe I just don't like men with ponytails."

"Damn. Ruins my plans for my hair, then." He's bluffing, of course. He just cut his hair a few days ago. The barber in Redcliffe has known him since he was a child, so it made Alistair feel like a kid in a very large body, but at least he's not quite so scruffy. It also reminds him, "oh! I wanted to shave."

"Wait," she says. "I'm almost done, and I'd like you to show me how you do it."

"What? Why?" He stops halfway to sitting up.

"Unless you don't want me to," she says. She stands, and when her body is sparkling with tiny drops of water, like she's been draped in jewels, she's even more arresting. "I just thought, maybe, like how you take care of my hair for me sometimes. But I don't know how."

She may not have finished her sentence before he's talking, but the image of that strikes him to his core. "Yes. Yes. I would *really* like you to—if you want—just let me, um. Get ready."

She's actually the one who takes longer to get ready, because she puts some kind of oil in her hair to keep it from getting dry. He's not sure what's in it, but it smells herbal and fresh, and it fills the whole room.

Then he teaches her how to help him shave.

He's not sure why this feels so much different when it's the other way 'round from their usual. It's easy for him to take care of her, and he likes when she

asks him to. She's good at instructing him on how to do it, and she praises him when he gets it right. And he's never exactly *liked* being on the receiving end of any sort of attention, even if it's positive.

Perhaps this is made up for by the way she's sitting on his lap with a blade at his throat.

He likes that more than he should.

She's slow at it, and careful, and he has to close his eyes so her watchful gaze doesn't get him all out of sorts. He's already overwhelmed by the fact that she decided to do this without putting any clothes on.

Because his eyes are closed, he doesn't realize when she's done. Well, he sort of does, because he feels a great deal less scuffy, but he doesn't look to check, and he doesn't pull away from her touch. Her fingers are little points of heat at his throat—her hands are *always* warm, apparently mages have good circulation. She tips his chin up with the flat of the blade. *That* brings him to attention. In several ways.

He's heard that when somebody is feeling particularly desirous, their pupils get very wide. George's eyes are such a dark brown that there appears to be no difference, so it's all in the rest of her face. He thinks he can read it pretty well.

He pushes forward against the unforgiving metal at his throat, glad it's not the sharp side, and kisses her.

She flicks the knife closed and drops it on the carpet.

He's intent on making her forget about all her worries, so he tells her he needs to know if he's doing it right, which encourages her to talk to him pretty much the whole time they're fucking. It's a good thing, too, because his ability to form words is questionable at the moment.

He touches her, first, hoping that maybe if he gets her close like this he'll actually get her off before he comes (he just *barely* managed that last time

and he's worried it won't happen again without effort). She asks him to put his fingers in her and he feels clumsy and awkward but *oh*, she's so wet.

She asks for his cock next, so he thinks he's not doing too poorly.

He doesn't think he's ever going to get used to the feeling of right when he gets inside her. He says as much, and her hips rise to meet his next thrust, and *she's* the one who moans.

It takes him longer to get the hang of it than it did last time, when she was riding him and he was just trying not to lose his mind and/or come. It's more difficult to be on top, and at one point he slips out, but he gets back in and she begs him for *harder*.

He does, but it doesn't seem he goes quite hard enough. She makes the same request seconds later.

"I don't want to hurt you, love."

"You won't. I promise. Give me everything you've got, I *know* you can fuck me harder than that. *Ah*— there's a good man."

He gives her what he's asking. And gives it to her until she's crying his name.

—

Alistair goes downstairs to the inn proper afterward to get them both something to eat, and a woman at the bar, who looks like some sort of wealthy merchant too fancy for the Spoiled Princess, stops him. (The Blight brings people together, and it also puts people into places you wouldn't normally find them.) He's not sure *why* she's just grabbed his shoulder, but he says, "hello?" anyhow.

"Are you Alistair?"

That's odd. "Yes? Do I know you from somewhere?"

She laughs behind a gloved hand. When she draws it away, her mouth is curved in a smile. Her lips are painted a very bright red. "I've heard your name."

"Where?"

"I believe I have the room adjacent to yours." She must know he's followed where she's going, because his face is already getting red. "It seems *you* were making your lady friend very happy. And now that I've seen you, I'd not say no to being next, if you're willing. I pay well."

He stammers something like, "I. Um. Thank you. But. That's not—I'm not—I should go." Then, he grabs the tray with their dinner and runs back upstairs like a dog with its tail between its legs.

He's obliged to tell George about it because she notices something off immediately, and following his explanation, she laughs so hard he starts laughing too.

"I want to say I'm sorry for getting us caught," George says, "except I'm not sorry at all. How much was she offering to pay you?"

He flops back onto the bed, groaning and hiding his face behind his arm. "I don't *know*, I didn't *ask*. I'm not a... a..."

"Not a whore?"

"Exactly." He rubs his eyes. "At least not for anybody but you."

He finally sits up and starts eating—it's just a simple stew, the sort you find at any inn in Ferelden. Easy enough to make an enormous pot of and feed all your patrons for the night. But he's *starving*, probably thanks to their previous activities, and it's the best thing he's ever tasted all of a sudden.

"You're only a whore if you get paid." George sounds like she heard that somewhere. Maybe from that pirate in Denerim who played cards with her for hours and cheated terribly the whole time. "I'm certainly not paying you."

"No, I know what our funds look like."

When she finishes chewing, she says, "if you're not getting paid, you're a slut, not a whore. So I hear."

Maybe it was Zevran who doled out these important pieces of wisdom.

"Oh, well, *that*, I'm alright with."

It's just a joke, but she says, "Alistair, if you *want* me to call you names in bed, you just have to ask."

The neighbors are going to have to deal with more noise disturbances, he supposes.

(She doesn't call him a slut, just just calls him '*good boy*,' which is more effective on Alistair than it ought to be.)

They're too tired out to worry about tomorrow afterward.

Sleeping in a bed together is nice. The mattress sags a little bit, so they both roll toward the center, and he falls asleep with his head on her shoulder and his arm around her. It's a nice sleep, but it's not *good*. Neither of them sleep well, but they always have somebody to hold onto when the nightmares wake them.

Alistair thinks her nightmares aren't all darkspawn tonight.

—

They rise before dawn and head to the docks, Alistair still yawning and not quite able to hide it. Leliana looks fresh as a daisy in the springtime, her hair all fluffy and her skin all dewy from her evening of self-care.

Pudding is nice and clean also, which means Leliana convinced him to let her give him a bath. Alistair appreciates the dog especially this morning, for the way he sticks close to George, butting his nose against her hand. They're facing this as a mission, fully armed, and it doesn't feel quite like the right time for Alistair to put an arm around her, but her mabari can stay close.

Any tension last night might have eased comes back in full force with the Circle tower looming again. Alistair can't imagine living at the top of that thing; he'd get dizzy looking out the window.

The brief look of surprise that crosses George's face and the conversation that follows when the ferry docks with a templar onboard tells Alistair that this is not usual. The templar, who's the sour sort of man Alistair remembers being told off by during his stint in the order, says there's something wrong at the tower, and nobody is allowed in or out. He's only there waiting for even *more* templars to arrive.

George, her face hard and her brows tight, persuades the templar to take them across with a combination of, '*we're Grey Wardens here on duty,*' and, '*I know your superior and he is going to be pissed off.*'

So they get on the boat.

He's never seen her this rigid. Her spine is straight, and she's breathing like she'd been when she was wounded. Leliana sits beside her, because otherwise the boat will be off-balance, and she has an arm behind her, a hand passing steadily back and forth at the small of her back. Alistair's glad she has that comfort, but he doubts anything could really calm her.

It gets worse when they land.

The tower is a *wreck*. There are people screaming, right from the get-go. It's almost all templars down here. Actually, no. It *is* all templars. Where are the *mag*es?

There's nothing like a crisis to set you moving. George talks to the Knight Commander without fear, more *anger* than anything. Alistair understands why.

The mages are *locked in the tower*. With the abominations. And blood mages. And demons. There are *children* in there, nearly everyone George has ever known is in there. She demands they be let through, and Alistair is ready to break the door down if the Knight Commander doesn't agree.

Leliana has no door-breaking-down skills, but she seems equally horrified to know what the templars have done.

They're allowed in. It's with the restriction that they may not be allowed out.

He doesn't think for a second that George views this as a difficult choice.

There's a senior enchanter they run into straightaway, an older woman who seems level-headed despite the danger and who offers to go back into the fray with them. She's brought a group of younger mages and children out, and George offers to leave her mabari here to protect them. Alistair privately thinks that having a dog around might settle the children down a little bit. Pudding is good at that.

They press on.

George knows the place, that much is clear, and it's hurting her to see it like this. In the lower levels, there are corpses everywhere. Some of them, she can't look at. Alistair thinks this is because she recognizes them.

"If I had been here," she says, acid in her voice, "I could have stopped this."

"If you had been here, you could have just as easily been a casualty." Wynne's tone is no-nonsense. "You might have been Irving's own apprentice, but no singular mage is powerful enough to stop something like *this*."

"With all of us together, we can stop it now, before it gets any worse," Leliana says.

"Of course we can. Just point me at the nearest abomination." Alistair's fingers brush the back of George's neck, over the collar of her shirt.

"Please be careful," is all she tells them.

He knows why. Too many people she once knew are lying dead.

There are *some* survivors. One of the mages hid in a wardrobe, and there's an odd man in the stockroom who's still there despite the battle at hand. George and Wynne convince him to leave for his own safety, but it's a near thing. Alistair thinks the man might be insane, until he sees George shake her head, looking more sad than confused.

"I can't believe somebody didn't think to try to get the Tranquil out."

Tranquil. Alistair knows what the Rite is, but has no idea how it's performed, and as far as he knows, he's never met a Tranquil before now.

"Not everybody remembers about them, Georgiana," Wynne says.

Wynne seems to be the only one who can call her 'Georgiana' without getting a warning about a fireball to the backside.

The further they go, the more insane things seem to become. They're searching for a mage who has something that ought to keep them from having their minds overtaken by blood mages, which Alistair is very thankful for, because he didn't even *know* blood mages had mind control up their sleeves, and now he's suddenly very scared of it.

Upstairs is a *mess*; there's what looks like viscera spewing from the walls, and Alistair can't help a disgusted remark. The smell of it is making him nauseated.

Then they open an inconsequential door and everything goes to shit.

He doesn't remember much about their trip to the Fade after they wake up. He recalls feeling soft and warm, like he was settled in a comfortable bed and wanted to sleep forever. He was safe. He had everything he wanted. He can't remember what it was that he wanted, but he had it.

For a moment, when someone burst in, it was terrible. He felt like his dreams were being wrecked or torn to shreds. And then the warmth and the light faded to the background, and Alistair realized none of it had been real. He wakes with the feeling that he's been in a battle, but he can't remember any of that, either.

They keep going up the tower. George clutches a little scrap of paper like it's a lifeline, and if it's the only thing that keeps their sanity intact from the forces of a blood mage, then she's holding it correctly.

There's a templar trapped at the top of the stairs, and he's haunted, tortured enough to beg them to kill every mage in the tower. George may address him by name, and she may look marginally concerned about him, but she reels back in disgust when he asks them to wipe everybody out.

It's possible, *"I'd let every maleficar in here go free before I'd kill one innocent mage,"* is a bit much, but she's pissed off and she wants to intimidate him and she seems like she's succeeding.

Alistair, a bit selfishly, can't stop thinking about how the man cried George's name, called her the one thing he always wanted but never had, implied that the demons were using his feelings for her to torture him. He's not jealous or protective or anything like that. He's just... he's glad he never became a templar. Otherwise, he might have spent all his time longing and none of his time loving her.

Also, she looks markedly horrified by this Cullen fellow, so Alistair *really* would not want to be that man, at present.

He'd much rather be at her side, walking into a battle and knowing he has a shield to protect her with.

—

Once all is said and done at the Circle they have Senior Enchanter Wynne along for the journey, the support of Ferelden's main body of mages, and several new additions to Alistair's list of 'things I never want to fight again', including blood mages and abominations.

He finds George sitting beside Wynne at camp, on a blanket spread out by the tent that Alistair helped get set up for the newest member of their company. (It's hard not to offer help to Wynne, she's like a grandma.) George is sort of curled in on herself, her knees drawn to her chest, and the two of them are talking quietly. They lost a lot of the same people.

He initially intends to leave them be and let them have their time together, but then George's head lifts, and they both look in his direction. George looks back at Wynne and says something, and he wonders if it's egotistical of him to presume they're talking about him.

George waves at him to beckon him over, so he supposes it's not.

Wynne looks him over like she's evaluating him for some reason. "I told Georgiana I was curious about you, young man."

'*Young man*'. Wynne really is a grandmother. Alistair's sort of charmed by it.

"I hope you're not too curious," he says. "George has some stories that *really* ought not to be shared in polite company."

Wynne is smiling at him, but it looks a little patronizing, like if she was anybody else she would be rolling her eyes. "I'm sure I've seen worse in my day."

He shrugs. George pats the blanket next to her, so he sits there.

"She tells me you are not, in fact, a templar." Wynne sounds surprised, because she would have seen him fight.

George would have seen him fight. That was the first time he really made use of his templar abilities, because they'd not fought a lot of mages so far. He can't help wondering if it upset George to see him smiting mages and dropping dispels on them. He offers the standard explanation. "I was trained as one, but I never formally joined the order."

"Well, I was glad to have you," Wynne says. "The templars who abandoned us ought to be ashamed of themselves. You performed their own duties better than any of them. *They* should have been the ones protecting the mages, but we were glad to have the Wardens."

George leans back on her hands. "We didn't need them. They would have only caused more death and destruction." There's a lingering '*as usual*' in

her tone.

"There is a place for them, and a necessary one." Wynne folds her hands gracefully in her lap.

It is a testament to how much George respects this woman that she doesn't protest. Alistair knows George has a baseline dislike for templars, and an ingrained disrespect for them, also. But maybe she's just too worn out to argue with the only person around who's just gone through the same loss she has.

"Yes, well, I'm glad it's not *Alistair's* place," George says.

"Me *too*. If I was a templar, I wouldn't have any enterprising young Wardens to come rescue me, personally, from the Fade. Can you imagine?"

He's doing his usual, trying to make light somehow, but it just makes her look even *sadder*. "Yes, I suppose not," she says.

"Thank you, for that," he tries. It doesn't seem to dull her sorrow.

Wynne pats him on the hand. "I imagine Georgiana had a much more trying time in the Fade than the rest of us." To her, she says, "thank you for going through those trials for our sake—the tower would have fallen without you doing something few mages ever have."

That makes George smile, if a bit weakly.

—

He asks her that night if she wants to tell him what she saw in the Fade. First, she gives him wild and almost unbelievable stories about shapeshifting and fighting demons and earning power that's made her stronger, even now.

Then, she lapses into a quiet moment, and when she speaks, it's softer. "The thing demons do to people to trap them..." she says, looking down at her own hands, folded in her lap. "The easiest way is just to give them what they want. They make it seem like all your desires are coming true, so then

you never *want* to leave. For some, they need something stronger—Niall was trapped in the same maze I was, and Wynne was driven to inaction by images of hopelessness—but on the most part, they just make you *happy*."

"I'm guessing they didn't need anything fancy or powerful to deal with me," Alistair says. "I remember being... content."

"You had a *family*," she says, her voice coming from her raw, like she's giving him a confession. "Your sister loved you and you were able to be a part of her life and her children's lives, and you were *so happy*. And then I broke that apart."

"That *is* something I've wanted for a long time," he says. He takes her hands in his, turning one palm up, pressing his fingers in where she gets tense holding her staff. It's the same place he'd get sore after fighting with a spear or a halberd for a long time. "But I know that's not the way things are. There's no point in having your greatest wishes granted if it's not *real*. I like my life where it is, George. There's a lot that's hard, but I'm glad I'm not just an ordinary person at a time like this. I can help people." He squeezes her hand a little, a reassurance. "And they couldn't possibly have given me the perfect life if you weren't there."

There's a pressure in her chin and lower lip that he notices. She's holding something back.

"I mean it. If it's supposed to give you your greatest desire, that's a *big* one that's missing."

Her voice is unusually hoarse, a choked whisper. "You didn't *know* me." He figures out what she was holding back—tears. "You didn't recognize me. I *know* it's stupid, and I know the Fade does strange things, but it showed you the depth of your desires and you didn't know who I was."

He can't honestly say why that is. It would require more theorization on the Fade than he's able to give. Maybe the demon just couldn't create something that he'd convincingly believe was George, because he knows her so much better than Goldanna. Maybe there was no reason to give him George

because he already *has* her love. Maybe making him forget about George was the only way to keep him from fighting to be freed.

Alistair's of the mind that tossing theory back and forth over something neither of them understand isn't going to help anything. He just pulls her close and says, "then I'm even more relieved you got me out of there. I don't know what the version of me in the Fade was working with, but I don't know that matters, because here, *now*, I can't imagine being without you."

"This is so—I can't believe I'm— *ugh*." She sounds angry, more than anything. He thinks she might be angry at him, but then she says, "why am I upset about this? Dozens of people I've known almost all my life *died*, and I'm only crying because you forgot about me in the fucking *Fade*."

"I dunno, it seems reasonable to me." Alistair rests his chin on top of her head.

"I think it seems more like that time Morrigan had a dream you did something horrible and was angry with you for a week," she says. He's still not sure exactly what he did on that particular dream-occasion—Zevran thinks Morrigan had an unwanted sex dream about Alistair, but she kept saying it *could* be a *premonition*, so that certainly wasn't possible.

This isn't like that, though.

"I think sometimes our minds can't process that amount of grief, but we still need some kind of release, so it's the smaller hurts that we upset ourselves over. I suppose."

Her voice is muffled, but he can still hear her. "That's very wise of you. It sounds very smart."

"It's not. It's just that I'm thinking about that time I cried because I burned dinner, but I was actually upset about Duncan and Cailan and everybody else we lost at Ostagar. This is an even more rational thing to be upset about." As he speaks, he pulls the tie out of her hair, letting it come tumbling down over her shoulders and her back, so that he can run his fingers along her scalp, just the tiniest action to soothe the greatest pain.

"Fucking demons," she says.

"Truly, they are the worst," he agrees.

—

Their next treaty on the list is with the Dalish, so they travel into the Brecilian forest, a long journey with a lot of bugs and trees, the roads growing thinner and more winding as they travel paths meant for aravels, not standard wagons. Alistair has always liked being out of doors, but this is a little too outdoorsy even for him.

When they stop each night, Alistair continues to train George with a sword. She seems even more determined after seeing the Circle fall, and she's getting quite good.

One night, after many failed attempts, she manages to disarm him *and* lays him out flat on his back. It's, unfortunately, extremely sexy. He's pretty sure the entire camp hears him moan when he hits the ground, and it's clearly not just because he's got the wind knocked out of him. Zevran definitely hears, and he won't stop doing that thing with his eyebrows afterward.

George jokes that Zevran can be next if he wants, and Zevran actually takes her up on that offer. She shows him a grand time, and he tries to teach her some Antivan form of wrestling which he keeps claiming works much better if you're naked and covered in oil. This seems to simply be the excuse he's giving for why George keeps winning, although Zevran *does* seem to like her sitting on top of him. Alistair can relate.

"Aren't you supposed to be jealous, or something?" Morrigan asks, as Alistair's lover straddles another man and pins his hands over his head.

"Maybe, but I'm not," he says.

"Oh? Whyever not?" She's prodding at him, trying to make him fumble for an excuse.

"Because, I'll get my turn."

Because, Zevran is the one she's rolling about with on the forest floor, but *Alistair's* the one she pins down later, in their tent, with a lot less clothes on.

"Do you want to learn how to use your mouth for more than just kissing me?" she asks him.

"Oh. Oh, *please*."

She rolls off of him. "Then move down—between my legs, here."

"Yes ma'am," he says, and she freezes. It makes him take pause, too. "Wrong thing to say?"

"Maybe? The sentiment wasn't, just... I don't think I like being called that."

He tries, "yes *sir*?"

It makes her shudder. *Good* shudder. He puts his hand on her and she sucks a breath in through her teeth. "*Yeah*, that's the one. Do that."

He whispers, "*whatever you ask of me, sir*," and he doesn't quite get to the mouth stuff he was expecting (not yet, anyway) because she hauls him in to kiss him.

Wow. He's gonna have to do it again if it makes her react like *that*.

They're just grinding against one another for a long while after, and Alistair goes from kissing her mouth to enterprisingly searching for new places—he likes when she kisses his jaw and neck, so he tries that, too. There's a spot that makes her squeal, so he bites a little bit there.

He passes his hand over the scars on her ribs, and she puts her thigh between his legs and he feels like he's gonna *come*, so it's definitely time to, uh. Get back on the path he was originally trying to travel.

"Show me how—with my mouth."

She's, uh. *Thorough*, with her instructions. She brings up his hand, licks his palm to show him how to do it, and her tongue *there* makes him think about her tongue *other places*, and every time she licks him it goes straight to his cock.

He is, however, not sure what to do with his hand afterward, now that it is all wet, which is kind of gross except that he's just kissed her, so it's not like he hasn't got her spit other places on him. He still thinks it would be bad just to put his wet hand on her thigh or something. He grabs the towel she used to wipe the sweat off her neck and chest after they fought.

He situates himself between her legs, and she grabs his chin. It makes him whimper. She lets go.

"No, that was—I like you holding me like that. I like when you sort of... manhandle me," he says. ' *When you flipped me on my back I became very glad my armor covers my groin,* ' he does *not* say.

"Okay, then." She grasps his chin again. "I just wanted to say *no teeth*. I know you like it when I bite your lip and I like it when you do the same but *not my clit*. Or anything down there, just to be safe. It's too sensitive."

He would nod, but she's holding him firm. He says, "yes, sir," instead.

She lets go, and pats him on the cheek. "Good boy."

"Can you sort of..." he sucks in a breath, not knowing how to say it or if it seems... *unmasculine* of him, somehow. George has never cared about that, but it's a strange and sudden concern. "Would you maybe guide me, a little bit? Like, hold onto my head and such?"

"Of course." She puts a hand on his shoulder, and pushes him steadily downward.

Alistair always thought this would taste a little bit bad. Men seemed to dislike the act sometimes, so that's the only reasoning he can really come up with. Of course he wouldn't really care, because it's her, but he's surprised, because it's actually... it's actually very good.

He can't describe it and he doesn't want to. All he knows is he wants to keep licking her where she tells him she wants to be licked, sucking her where she tells him she wants to be sucked. She keeps a warm hand cupped to the back of his head the whole time, not keeping him pressed against her, but making him feel like she's the one in control of all this.

And she starts making *noises*.

It's not that she's usually quiet. It's that usually they're sort of talking, or they're kissing, or it's just heavy breathing punctuated by the occasional noise of pleasure, which usually comes along with words. "*That's good,*" or, "*right there,*" or, "*fuck!*"

She's not really doing words right now, George.

She's just moaning, and it's getting sort of high pitched and breathy, especially when he sucks on her clit, and it's *cute*. It's so, so cute. She's all squeaky. He wants to make her do it some more.

"What?" she asks him, her voice all breathy, too. "Why are you *laughing*, Alistair?"

"You're cute," he says. "That's all. You're just cute. I shouldn't laugh, though, I'm sorry." He kisses the inside of her thigh in what he hopes is a nice apology.

The muscle there twitches. "Oh, I'm not used to somebody with stubble being down there."

"It doesn't hurt, does it?" One time, he made the side of her neck all red. It was under her collar and she wasn't bothered, but he apologized anyway. Twice.

"It feels nice." She ran her fingers through his hair. "Keep doing what you were doing, that was... that was really nice, too."

He keeps doing what he was doing until she starts making those noises again, and then they get louder, and then he can't hear really well at all,

because her thighs close and his head is stuck right there. If he couldn't breathe through his nose he might worry she was trying to suffocate him. Instead, he just keeps tonguing her clit in his mouth until she lets him go.

He licks broadly over her sex again, and the taste of her come makes the urgency of his own orgasm fly right into the forefront of his brain again.

She pulls him close to her again, and they're nose to nose before he remembers to ask, "wait, is it okay if I kiss you right now, or...?"

"Alistair."

"Oh. Is that *not* weird?"

She kisses him, so it must not be. And then she puts her thigh between his legs again, and he doesn't stop until he's spilling himself over for her, and she's keeping that tight hold on his chin while she kisses his mouth.

—

Wynne corners him after a few days of the trip, when they're deep enough in the forest that they're hiking it, so she's not sitting in the front of the wagon beside Bodahn and Sandal. When she asks to have a word with him, Alistair thinks she's just going to complain about something of his sneaking into her laundry again, but it's actually much worse.

"Well," she says, "I have been meaning to ask you what specifically is going on between yourself and Georgiana. One can't help but notice that the two of you are attached at the hip."

This is even more awkward than the time she caught him staring at George's arse.

"Um," he replies. Then, once he realizes she won't let him get away with a one-syllable, non-word answer, he says, "many things. Stopping the Blight together chief among them. Also, sword fighting. A lot of that has been going on between us. She's getting good, don't you think?"

"I was referring to your relationship. The romantic one, in case you were thinking of further demurring."

He was. He definitely was. "Oh. That. Well, er..." *Why* does he feel like she shouldn't know this, like he's been caught sneaking out of the monastery after curfew? Wardens have no rules against fraternization that he knows of, there's no actual reason he *shouldn't* be seeing her. But Wynne makes him feel like he should absolutely be scolded for what he's been up to. *Oh, Maker, he hopes their tent is far enough she hasn't heard...* "It's... she and I—well. I'm not really sure what to call her."

"You're not?"

"I dunno. 'Girlfriend' feels trite, 'lover' feels... Antivan. 'Partner' sounds like I could just be saying we're a team of Wardens together. I think more accurately I could say, 'I am very much in love with her and she feels the same for me and we share a tent and a bed and we used to just like to be near one another but then we kissed one time and then we kissed a lot more, like a *lot* more, and did many other things I've never quite felt the urge to do with somebody, and one time she almost died and I thought the world would end, because what's a world without her in it?' But that's a bit wordy."

She looks a bit taken aback, like she didn't expect such a lengthy description, but to be fair, he didn't expect to give one.

"I was just wondering if you were intimate, and whether you were being safe about it," she says.

Is *that* what this is about? Augh! No! NO. This is not a conversation he wants to have!

He only says, "*what?*"

"I was going to tease, but... Alistair, I know you were raised by the Chantry, but I do hope somebody explained to you how a man becomes a father. It's not the thing about the good Fade spirits bringing babies out of your dreams and placing them in your arms."

Nobody's ever told him that particular story, anyhow. "No! I mean, yes, I know, but *no*, we're not going to. We're *Wardens*! That's not—okay. So. It's not possible." This conversation was bad enough with *George*, when she asked out of '*absolutely no reason but curiosity*' before they were even together, making him unpleasantly concerned she was going to sleep with Zevran or somebody. "Female Wardens can't have children. That is, uh, that is so not a concern."

"Ah." Wynne plants her staff more firmly so that she can hop up a little incline they've come across, while Alistair trips over it. "I am glad to hear Georgiana was correct."

"You asked Georgie first!? And you didn't leave it at that? *Wynne*," he whines, trotting after her. "Why would you make me talk about that?"

"Do you want my real answer?"

"Erm. Yes?"

She shrugs and says, "I thought it would be funny."

He hefts his pack higher on his shoulder. "That's cruel. That's terribly mean of you. I take back everything I said about wanting you to adopt me. Please don't ask me about it again."

She only laughs.

—

It's time for a new entry into 'things Alistair did not expect to fight as a Warden, because they are definitely not darkspawn'.

Werewolves.

There's a curse, there's a beast with a terrifying name, there are werewolves loose all over the forest, and the Dalish won't help until all of this is solved. Terrible of everybody to all have their own problems when the Blight is looming like a black cloud over the world.

When the Keeper tells them that they ought to avoid the werewolves' teeth themselves, lest their stake in this become '*personal*', Alistair shudders.

They resolve not to let that happen.

That resolve lasts approximately a mile into the woods, and then Alistair is pinned to the ground and bitten by a werewolf. He's fixed up right after, because Wynne is an extremely accomplished healer. He figures he's fine after that, because he's a Warden, so he's immune to most things and lycanthropy is probably among them.

He says as much aloud, but a few hours later, as the sun is setting and they put up a campfire to rest for the night, everybody is looking at him out of the corners of their eyes.

Wynne ruffles his hair, which he thinks is nice until he realizes she's putting her hand on his forehead so she can make sure he's not running a fever. Leliana keeps asking him how he's feeling as if she expects him to keel over every second. George, least subtle of all of them, keeps looking at his mouth, which would ordinarily be sexy, except he's pretty sure she's checking for *fangs*.

"I am *not* turning into a werewolf," he announces to the group at large.

"Nobody said you are," George says.

"You're all thinking it."

None of them protest this, because they're all relatively honest people, while capable of duplicitousness.

"I'm not!" He waves his hands with a little too much effort. "I'm a *Warden*. There's no way Wardens can become werewolves! *George*, you have to believe that."

"I promise I'll cure you if you become a werewolf," she says, with too much severity to be joking.

"Well, that's very sweet of you, but I won't."

Leliana gives him a friendly nod. "A positive attitude is very helpful in these situations, Alistair. Good for you."

George takes watch first, and Alistair lays with his head in her lap. "I really won't be a werewolf," he tries again.

"I know, Alistair," she says, petting his head, but there's a hard set to her jaw that says she doesn't believe him.

—

He *doesn't* become a werewolf. He'd like to say a great big 'I told you so' to the rest of them, but so much additional strange shit has happened since they set out, he can't bring himself to joke.

The curse is nastier than any of them expected. The werewolves are now a pack of humans with golden eyes, and they've dispersed into the woods, but Alistair knows the others are also feeling strangely responsible for and worried about them, now that they're no longer under protection from a forest spirit.

Their worries are put to the side when they run into a woods full of giant spiders on the way back. Alistair hates all giant spiders, and has fought enough of them for a lifetime, but George takes strange glee in shapeshifting into a spider to fight the rest of the spiders. Then it's annoying for the rest of them to tell which one is George.

When they get back to the Dalish camp, they're welcomed with thanks for breaking the curse, and they spend some time recuperating among the clan. Alistair wrestles another few legends out of the storyteller, although they all come with a heaping side of 'shemlen are terrible and only do horrible awful things but maybe they are alright if they fix our werewolf problem I suppose'. Leliana is reading all the inscriptions on the statues of Dalish goddesses, and Wynne goes somewhere quiet to rest for a while.

Alistair realizes he has no idea where George is.

It is quite possible she's transformed into a giant spider and has climbed up a tree, but he doesn't see any oversized arachnids. She's apparently done fixing the romantic woes of Dalish teenagers who seem *far* too young to be picking life partners, although who is Alistair to talk? She's also not looking at the halla, which are magnificent creatures who unfortunately make sounds like sad goats.

He finds her by the forge, actually.

In fact, he finds a very shiny, very fancy suit of armor, thinks, '*ooh, I wonder what that is?*' and then realizes the ears of the person currently being fitted into it are very round, and oh, wait, that's *George*.

In proper armor.

It must be made from the ironbark she found in the woods. It gleams bright as silverite, although it doesn't look as heavy. Engraved into the metal are flowing patterns of vines and leaves, and it's fitted so well she was clearly carefully measured beforehand.

Alistair must have something a little backward to what most men have going through their minds, because he looks at a woman in full armor and has the same reaction most other men his age have to exposed skin. She's *dazzling*. He's dazzled.

The elf fitting George's armor turns her around, and she notices him standing there staring. "Alistair! Look, Varathorn here is assisting me in my journey to become a proper arcane warrior."

She learnt the term from a Dalish ghost (Maker, that temple was weird) and she's been determined to adapt their way of fighting ever since. Alistair just sort of nods, because he doesn't understand the arcane warrior thing, but that might just be his non-mageiness.

"Well? How does it look?" George asks him.

Varathorn, the elf, finishes the last buckle, and looks her up and down with all the pride of a craftsman inspecting his best work. "Yes, I think that will

do."

"Alistair?" George says. "I do actually want your opinion."

"It looks. Great. Fantastic, even. Very handsome."

"*Thank* you, love, but I was asking if you think it looks like it will protect me from being killed."

"Well, yes, that too."

—

They plan to head to Orzammar immediately after, but the best laid plans of Wardens often fall apart, more often when those Wardens are Alistair and George.

He'd make that into a bit of a joke, if it weren't for where they're headed.

Back to Ostagar.

It's as if there's a knot in his stomach and it's being wrenched tighter and tighter every step closer they get. A chill starts up, and there's snow on the ground before they make it to the fortress. He has to focus on George and her handsome, dazzling armor to keep himself grounded.

He feels a little guilty thinking that, because she must feel nearly as awful as he does, coming back here.

Wynne had been at the battle, too, with the Circle mages, not the Wardens. Leliana is the only one of them not returning to somewhere awful, and she seems to understand what the rest of them are going through, or at least empathizes with their foul mood.

At some point during all of it, Alistair has to sort of shut his mind off. How else is he supposed to deal with seeing Cailan's body hung like a martyr and rotting before an audience of darkspawn, his armor pieced out and stolen by each of the horrible beasts?

He can focus on the fight. He can focus on the newness of fighting alongside George as a warrior, blades in both their hands, the way she'll stop and stand firm before blasting fire or ice or lightning at their foes. She's always been an asset on the field, but like this... He actually starts feeling better about their chances with the archdemon.

Especially when he watches her leap headfirst at an ogre and take it down. That's kind of sexy, actually. He can forget about the circumstances to appreciate the way she moves, especially because he knows she's learned it from him.

That last bit is especially clear when she turns over her shoulder to look at him as if waiting for him to acknowledge that she's done what he taught her.

The fact that the ogre has been necromantically raised by a darkspawn mage is troubling, deeply so, but when she's wrenching the blade that initially killed it from its chest, he finds it harder to be troubled.

Wynne even tries to break the tension by flirting with him, which makes George laugh so hard she has to put her hands on her knees so she doesn't fall over.

Things slide back toward somber when they hold what little ceremony of a funeral they can for Cailan.

Seeing the pyre does make Alistair rest easier, even though his heart is aching knowing that they never found Duncan's body, and can't afford him the same honor.

When they're back at camp and he's sitting by the fire, George unwraps the blade she pulled out of the ogre's chest.

It's Duncan's. He didn't notice before.

She sets it across his lap and tells him she thinks he should have it.

"I can think of nobody he'd want to hold onto it more than you," she says, watching his hands curl around the hilt.

He doesn't say anything for a long time. He presses his hand over his mouth and feels the hot tracks of tears down his cheeks, and he knows he can't breathe steady.

She comes close beside him but she doesn't sit down, she just stands by him and lets him rest his head against her stomach, his free hand clasped to the back of her knee. It's easier than having somebody at eye level while he's crying. She runs her fingers over the back of his head, his shoulders, and she doesn't say anything to him. She doesn't ask if he's alright, because she knows he's not.

When she speaks, it's only to ask him what he needs.

And all he needs, all he *ever* needs, is for her to hold onto him.

Author's Note:

If you want to see pictures of George, visit my tumblr [@luddlestons](#) and if you want to experience me being a nerd about classics, visit me on Twitter [@luddlestons](#) and if you want to see all that but horny, I invite you to my NSFW twitter [@luddlessmut](#)